

Plain Language Introduction

Resources

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaJI-ef18ls>
- <https://centerforplainlanguage.org/learning-training/five-steps-plain-language/>
- <https://youtu.be/OXcLwIZOE1s>
- <https://www.plainlanguage.gov/training/create-your-own-class/>

What is Plain Language?

Communication that your audience or readers can understand the **first time** they hear or read it.

Plain Language Myths

Plain Language is **NOT**:

- “Dumbing down” the concept.
- Stripping out *necessary* terminology.
- Just editorial “polishing” after you finish writing
- Imprecise

Why Use Plain Language?

- Reduce audience time trying to translate difficult, wordy documents.
- Clear understanding to a wider audience.
- Increase interest and engagement.
- Increased use of information.
- To make your message stand out.

Identify your audience



Think of why the audience will want to read your document



Keep in mind the audience's level of technical expertise



Write to everyone who is interested, not just to experts (focus on the 90 percent of readers in the middle of the spectrum)



Even an expert will prefer a clearly written document

Focus Outward On the Reader

☹ NOT...

What do **I** want to say?

How can **I** focus on **my** interests?

What can I do to **impress** you?

☺ BUT...

What does **the audience** need to know?

How can **I** focus on **the audience's** interests?

What can I **clearly express** to the **audience**?

Stay Focused

No one wants to read material like the next slide.

Coast Guard Boating Information

- **CO Detector Update:**
- The Coast Guard has conducted an investigation to determine what carbon monoxide (CO) detection devices are available to recreational boaters, such that, when installed and activated could reduce the risk of being exposed to high levels of CO -**THAT SILENT KILLER**. A variety of technologies is available for detecting the presence of CO on boats and should be considered by recreational boaters to reduce their risk of injury or death while boating.
- (72 words)

Coast Guard Boating Information

- Carbon monoxide is a silent killer. The Coast Guard recommends that you use a carbon monoxide detection device on your boat to reduce the risk of being exposed to high levels of CO. You may choose from a variety of devices. (39 words)

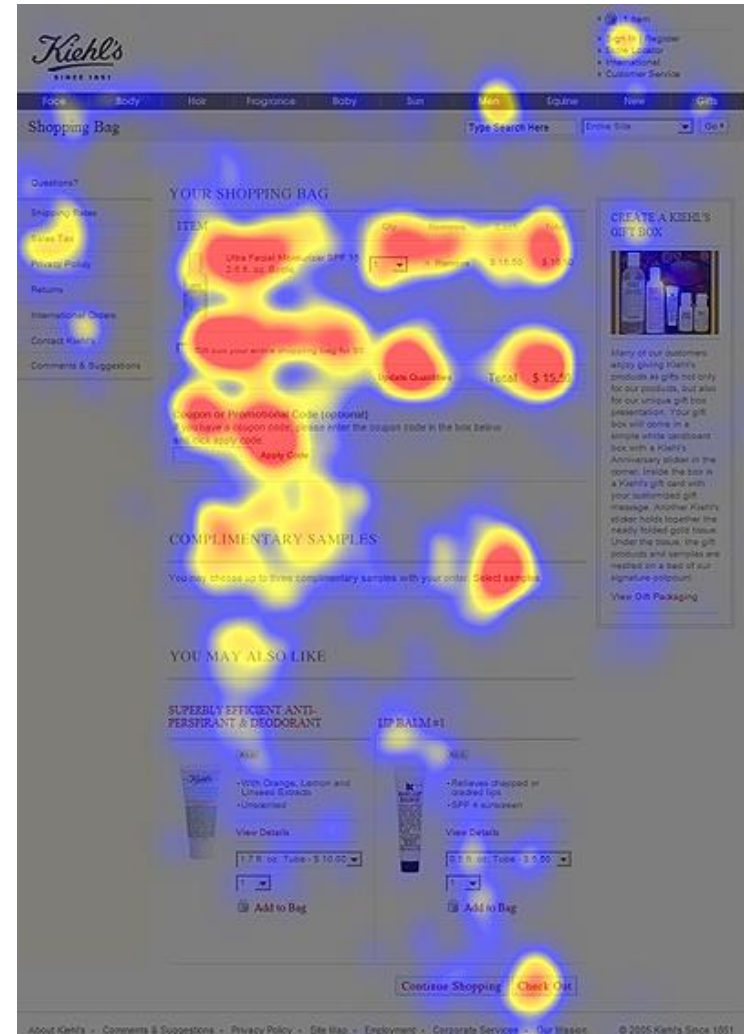
Plain Language and the Web

- Web users scan – they don't read. Many web pages are too dense.
- Plain language helps keep web content as short and as readable as possible.
- Avoid bloat! Less is more!

Web Writing

- People read 25% slower on the Web
- Cut out 50% of your text
- Online readers focus on headings and bulleted list information

Image from Nielsen Norman Group usability eye tracking test (2006)



Avoid Jargon

Jargon

Accessible Equitable Words

Elucidate

Clarify

Contemporaneously

At the same time

Obfuscate

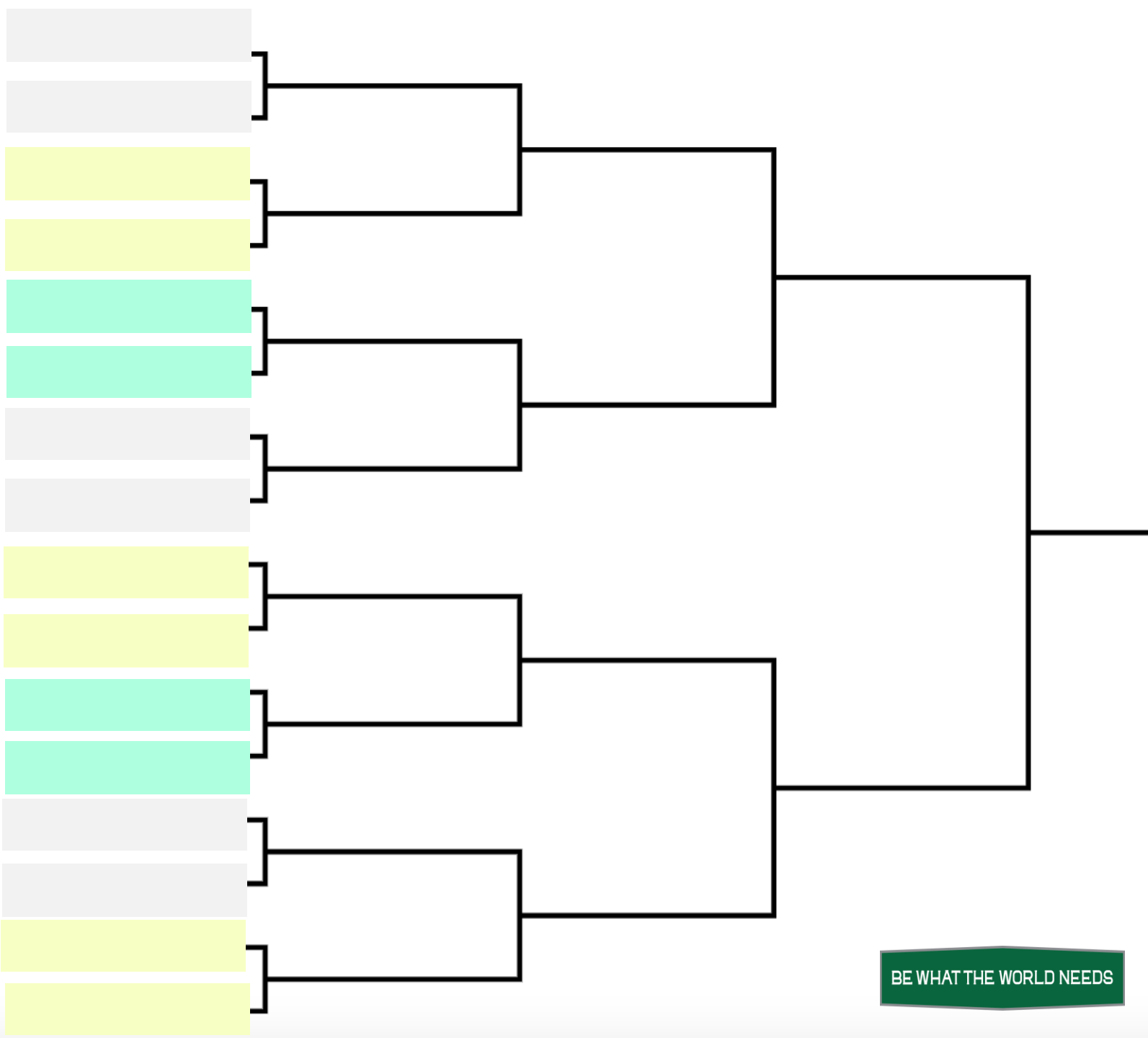
Confuse

Pedagogy

Why teaching strategies are chosen

Synchronous

At the same time



What is an Equitable Phrase?

Lithodial fragments ought not to be projected by the inhabitants of vitreous abodes.

Simpler is Better

People who live in glass houses
shouldn't throw stones.

What is an Equitable Phrase?

A perissodactyl ungulate may be propelled toward a body of aqueous fluid, but such ungulate cannot be compelled or forcibly induced to imbibe such fluid.

Simpler is Better

You can lead a horse to water, but
you can't make him drink.

Class Exercise Option 1

Instructions:

1. Copy a paragraph of text from a website or from a document on your computer into a blank Microsoft Word document.
2. Use the spell checker to obtain a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level for the page. Aim for a grade 6-8 reading level.
3. Use the [Plain Language Checklist](#) to edit the text. Simplify, clarify, and improve the content.



Class Exercise Option 2

Instructions:

Copy a paragraph of text from a website or from a document on your computer into the [Hemingway App](#) to review the passage and use the feedback to adjust the readability. Aim for a grade 6-8 reading level.

Class Exercise Option 3

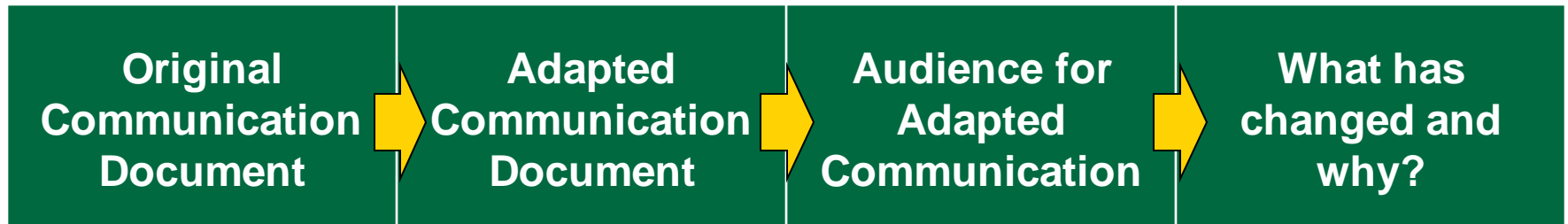
Instructions:

Have students exchange one paragraph of text from a recent writing assignment (e.g., introduction paragraph or abstract) and have a partner use either the spell checker from Microsoft Word or the [Hemingway app](#) and the [Plain Language Checklist](#) to translate the text into plain language.



Add Evidence to Your Portfolio

Professional Communication: Adapt communication for diverse audiences



Resources for writing in plain language

- [Usask Research Profile and Impact](#)
- [Usask Writing Centre](#)
- [NIH plain language training on the web](#)
- [Plainlanguage.gov](#)
- [Federal plain language guidelines](#)
- [Center for Plain Language](#)
- ***Writing Web Content that Works*, by Janice (Ginny) Redish**